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Miss Julie Harris
Headteacher
Seahouses Middle School
James Street
Seahouses
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Dear Miss Harris

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Seahouses Middle School, Northumberland

Following my visit to your school on 7 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

School leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- speed up improvements to teaching, including by making sure that the outcomes of monitoring activities lead to precise improvement points for staff and that these are acted upon promptly
- establish a shared view of what constitutes good or better teaching and what leaders expect to see in teachers' lesson planning
- further develop the contribution of subject coordinators to improvements to teaching and pupils' achievement.

Evidence

During my visit, I held meetings with you and with the subject coordinators for English and mathematics to discuss the impact of actions taken since the last

inspection. I also met with an adviser from the local authority who is supporting the school and also with two governors. I evaluated the improvement plan and other documentation, including records of the outcomes of monitoring activities. In addition, we visited a mathematics lesson in Year 6 and scrutinised a small selection of pupils' work.

Context

With effect from September 2014, you will relinquish your role as headteacher of Embleton First School. In addition, at the end of the current school term, the mathematics coordinator and the part-time teacher of French will also be leaving the school. In addition to his existing responsibilities, the English coordinator will assume the role of special educational needs coordinator from June 2014.

Main findings

Since the inspection, school leaders and governors have worked hard to address some of the areas identified at that time to be in need of improvement. However, despite the effective steps taken to strengthen aspects such as the impact of governance, too little emphasis has been placed on bringing about more rapid improvement to the overall quality of teaching.

The governing body are playing an increasingly effective role in supporting and challenging the school. The local authority adviser, who chairs the newly-formed steering committee, is providing good support for governors, who are gaining a better understanding of the work of the school. Individual governors are linked to specific aspects of the school improvement plan and are developing their involvement with the school through a programme of focused visits. Governors understand more clearly the gaps in performance between different groups of pupils as a result of the detailed analyses they have received from subject coordinators.

You have rightly maintained a focus on improving the quality of marking and feedback that was identified before the recent inspection. Inspection evidence confirms that the impact of this approach is becoming established. The written feedback that teachers provide about pupils' work is helping them to improve their learning. However, feedback to more-able pupils does not always identify how they can improve their work and deepen their understanding further.

Much less progress has been made in improving other aspects of teaching. For example, there is no commonly held view of what constitutes effective teaching or what leaders expect to see in teachers' lesson planning. As a result, the monitoring of teaching, which has only recently got underway, lacks focus and does not provide sufficiently precise improvement points for staff. Your records from the two work scrutiny activities completed to date do not identify clearly weaknesses in pupils' learning or how learning can be improved. Nevertheless, the work scrutiny has identified that progress is being made in establishing the whole-school marking

policy. There is an urgent need to secure more rapid improvements to teaching if the school is to meet its aspiration of becoming a 'good' school by the time of its re-inspection. In addition, although subject coordinators are taking greater responsibility for analysing assessment information, they are not yet contributing more effectively to improving teaching or raising achievement, particularly girls' achievement.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Local authority support for the school, although swiftly mobilised and well intentioned, has lacked sufficient impetus, particularly in relation to improvements to teaching. The linked school improvement adviser has, however, provided effective support for governance and in helping to develop the school improvement plan. In addition, links with Cragside Primary School and with Whitley Bay High School have been established. For example, in a recent visit to Cragside, your Year 6 teacher observed good practice in English which she was able to share back in school. However, although the headteacher of this school is a National Leader for Education, support for your leadership, and for that of your subject coordinators, is yet to gather momentum. The external review of governance, recommended at the recent inspection, has been completed. However, the findings and recommendations of the review have not yet been received by the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector